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TAGS: [CM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMCC](#)  
SUBJECT: CAMEROON: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH SENIOR  
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a September 25 courtesy call by the Ambassador, Secretary General to the President (and close Biya confidant) Laurent Esso described Cameroon's "sincere and deep" friendship with the United States and highlighted some of the country's historical challenges. While conceding that "everything cannot be perfect," he praised what he saw as the significant harmony in Cameroonian society. End summary.

#### U.S.-Cameroon Relations

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¶2. (SBU) Esso praised strong U.S. support for Cameroon. America's friendship is "sincere and deep", even if we don't agree on all issues, Esso stated. He pointed to President Biya's presence in the White House in 2003 on the day President Bush ordered U.S. military action to remove Saddam Hussein, describing it as a "mark of confidence" in our relationship and a sign that Cameroon stands with the United States when it matters most. Esso affirmed that President Biya shares this view. The Ambassador told Esso she intended to continue strengthening our bilateral relationship, especially engaging the new government following the September 7 Cabinet reshuffle. She mentioned specifically that we hoped to work with the government on a way forward on the Millennium Challenge Account.

#### Development Challenges

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¶3. (SBU) Esso highlighted Cameroon's historical difficulties as a developing country, noting the impact of colonialism, the unpredicted departure of its first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, and the lack of a blueprint for Cameroon to follow in meeting many of its challenges over the years. He hoped Cameroon's friends would understand the country's difficult situation, especially in managing its national diversity, and would understand that "everything cannot be perfect." Despite its challenges and what Esso depicted as exaggerated press reporting, he saw Cameroon as enjoying significant harmony between Muslims and Christians and among people along both sides of the Cameroon-Nigeria border. (Note: Then-Justice Minister Esso was Cameroon's lead advocate in the International Court of Justice in the Bakassi case. End note.)

#### Comment

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¶4. (SBU) This was yet another in a series of overwhelmingly positive calls by a newly arrived Ambassador, but it was perhaps the most important so far. Esso, a former Foreign Minister and Defense Minister, went out of his way to

underline Cameroon's (and Biya's) desire for a warm and growing relationship with us. He also emphasized the "difficulty" running a country like Cameroon -- once even saying it was more difficult than running the U.S. Biya, although in his mid-70s, is not a man in a hurry. Esso was asking us to understand and support the President's deliberative (some would say glacial) pace of reform. Esso was non-responsive when the Ambassador mentioned MCA, but Biya will, at some point, need to comprehend that MCA funds will be hard to come by if reforms here continue to move slowly relative to many other African countries.

GARVEY